

Paikara: An Iron Age Burial in South India

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INTRODUCTION

THE EXCAVATION reported here was an attempt to establish a firmer chronology for the pit-grave sites of the Nilgiri Hills. Although (when completed a dozen years ago) it was the first controlled excavation reported in this part of southern India, it did not produce a more definite dating for the culture under investigation.

The concluding part of this report is a brief review of the megalithic culture in the Nilgiri Hills, presented in an attempt to show the evidence for its temporal limits and its association with the culture of other parts of South India. The major finding of this study is the link with early Todas and the widespread culture of the Kurumbas, and with a period spanning much of the first millennium A.D. A tentative date for the excavated burial is the eighth century A.D.

SITE

The cinerary burial site, here called Circle E, is in the Nilgiri District of Tamil Nadu State on the summit of Paikara Hill (11°27'N, 76°37'E). Surface level at the site is exactly 7500 feet above mean sea level.

The area was covered by a short, rather coarse grass with tough roots, and had not been disturbed by any larger vegetation. The surface soil is lateritic, but underlying this at a depth too great to have been reached in the excavation is a gneissose granite.

The site was marked by a surface circle of unhewn rocks, one of five found on the same hilltop. The stratigraphy gave no evidence whatsoever of the site having previously been disturbed, and the turf inside the circle was level. Circles C and D on the same hill, in contrast, had been completely emptied of everything, including perhaps the fill itself, by nineteenth-century archaeologists.

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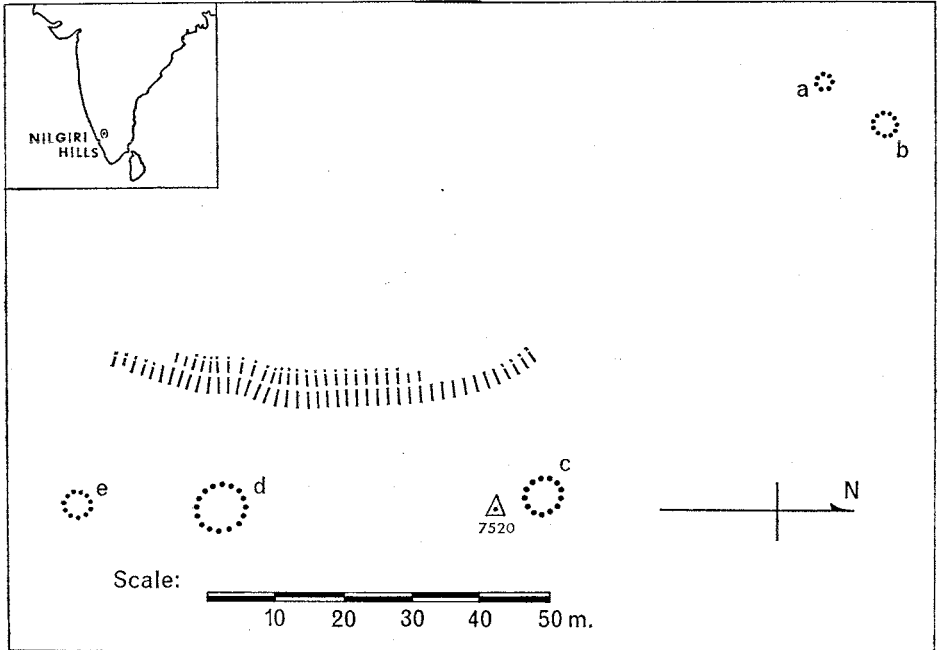


Fig. 1 The summit of Paikara Hill, with stone circles.

A sketch map of the entire complex of circles on Paikara Hill will be found in Figure 1.

The Excavated Stone Circle

Level with the surface at Circle E (Pl. I), or projecting to a maximum of 30 or 40 cm above it, is an irregularly shaped circle of 31 rough, unhewn rocks. When first laid in position, these stones probably formed a more regular circle than they now do (see the plan, Fig. 2.). They are all of the local granite, and could easily have been gathered by a few men from outcrops on the hill slopes within a hundred meters of the burial site.

Method of Excavation

Two coordinate strings cut the circle at ground level. One ran due east-west, the other north-south; their point of intersection was roughly the center of the circle. These strings divided the site into four sectors: NE, NW, SE, and SW. It was decided not to excavate the SW sector, so that a specimen of undisturbed strata would remain available for future investigators with more refined techniques. The other three sectors were cleared with trowels by 10-cm levels, as indicated on the plan, Figure 2. The position and depth of all finds were recorded relative to the two coordinates.

Stratigraphy

The covering of grass was first removed within the northern half of the circle. The grass itself yielded a large quantity of small potsherds, some actually lying on

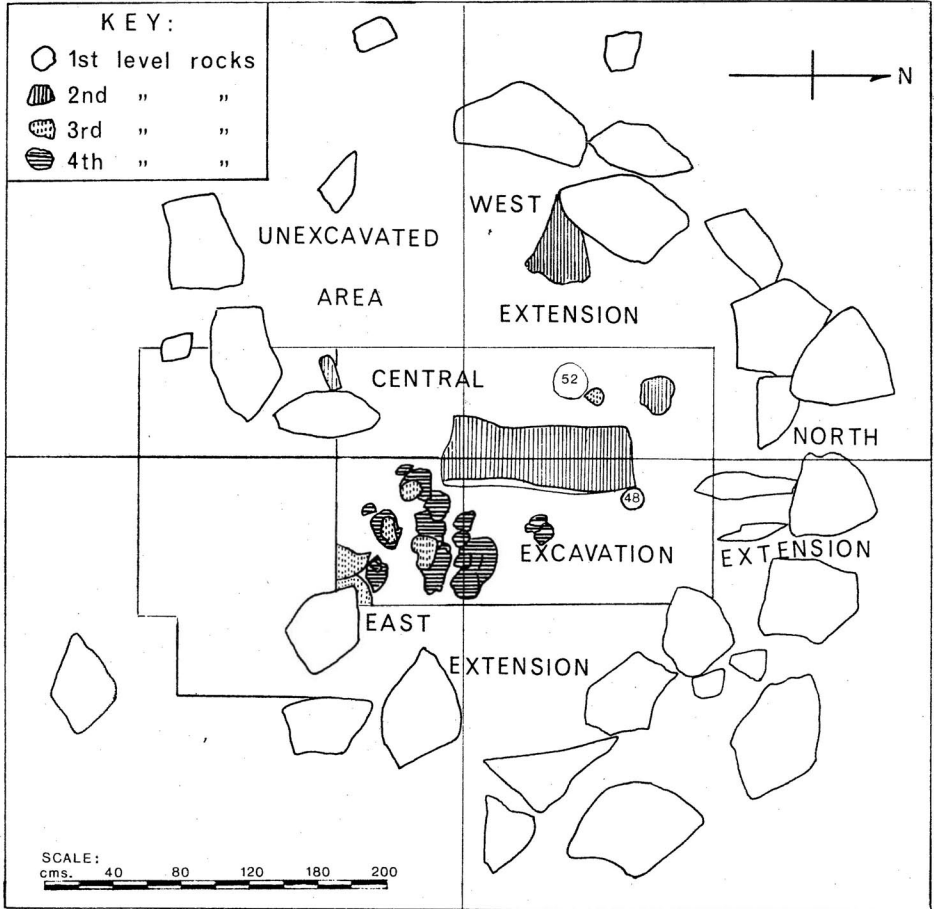


Fig. 2 Site plan of Circle E.

the surface of the turf. The undersoil was a fairly rich loam. Once this grass had been removed, the upper surface of the central stone (find 28) was laid bare.

Once the position of this stone had been ascertained, the SE sector was cleared of turf. Enough of the SW sector (otherwise unexcavated) was also cleared to permit the archaeologist to work around the central stone.

After the turf was removed, the fill was removed in 10-cm levels, sector by sector, and sieved. In the process of clearing the grave, I removed large quantities of potsherds, as well as 58 more important objects—nearly all terracotta figurines—which are detailed in the catalogue that follows.

Carboniferous soil was encountered, though of no distinguishable shape, at the SW corner of the central stone at a depth of 30 cm, and similarly on the NW corner of it at a depth of 40 cm. All around the central stone, and also underlying it, was a stratum of solidly packed hard granular stones, each about 0.5 cm in diameter. This stratum was mostly encountered at a depth of 35–45 cm, and was overlying the soft lateritic bedrock. A section on the western edge of the deep central cut, just to the west of the central stone, took this form:

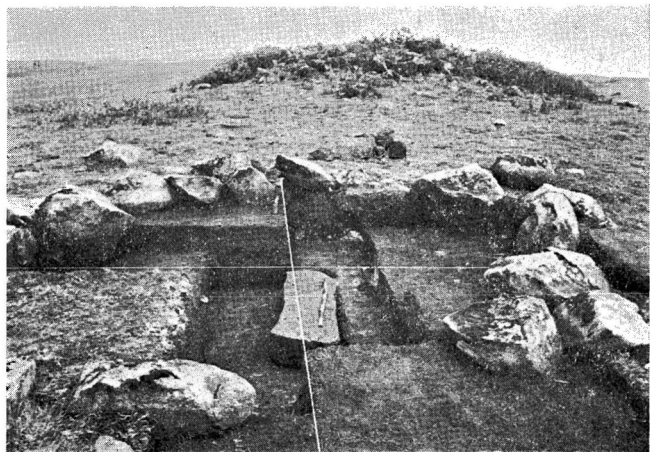
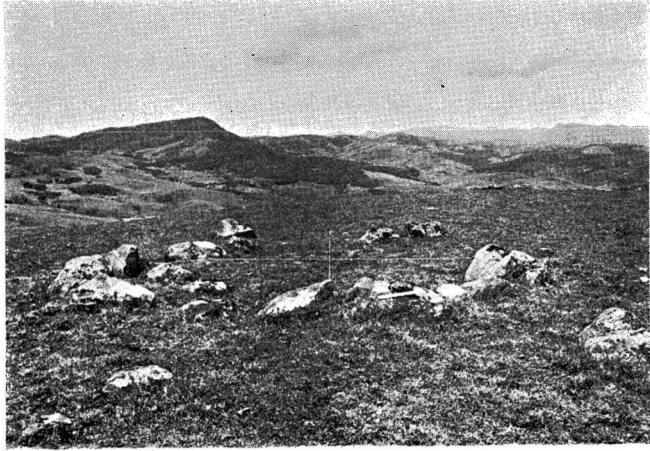
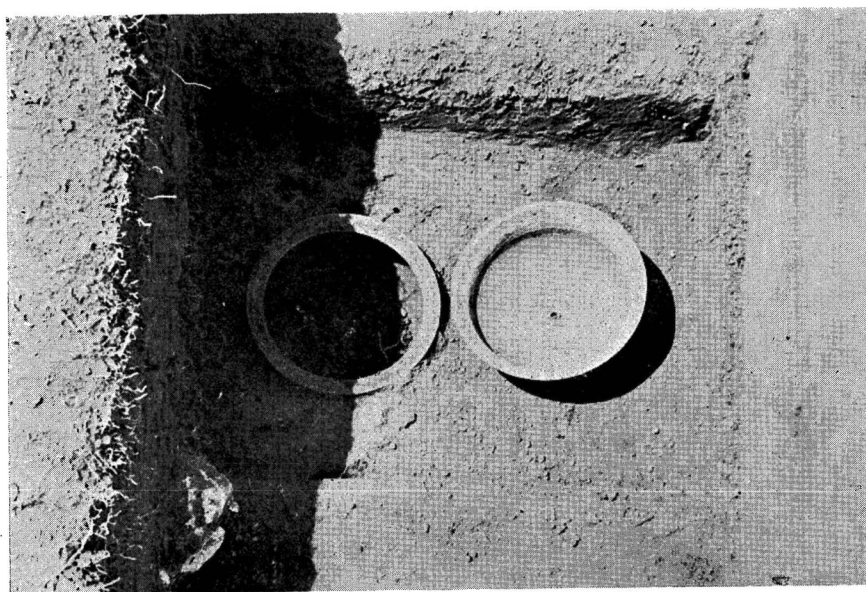


Plate I The Paikara Hill site, Circle E, looking (*top*) south, (*middle*) east, and (*bottom*) north to Circle D.



Plate II The cinerary burial.



18 cm	TURF
15 cm	LOAM
10 cm	GRANULAR STONES
↓	LATERITE

Much of the softer soil, and even some of the laterite, especially the fill around the cinerary urn and underneath the central stone, was heavily disturbed by the burrowing of a large species of earthworm. It seems likely that some recent wormcasts had fallen through the hole in the lid of the cinerary pot and mingled with the ashes.

The central stone (find 28) varied in thickness from 20 to 24 cm, and was lying directly on top of the horizon of small granular stones. Apart from this, however, it was covering nothing: no artifacts were found underneath it. The stone was of the local granitic rock which is to be found outcropping on the top of Paikara Hill. The fact that it rested quite horizontally suggests it had originally been buried in that position, rather than having fallen from a vertical position.

After excavating the central area, which contained this stone and the cinerary urn (Pl. II), we decided to excavate a northern and a southern extension from this central cut. Both these extensions lay under stones which were inside the main circle, although originally they were most probably units in the circle itself.

The central cut was cleared to a depth of 60 cm, at which level there was no pottery at all and the floor was the natural laterite. There was, however, an area of about 20 cm in diameter where the urn had been resting; here there was earth fill to a depth of about 65 cm, a base level which represented the bottom of the pit in which the urn had been buried.

The NW sector yielded much broken pottery, to a depth of 40 cm. This was mainly found within a meter of the central stone, however. In the NE sector, on the other hand, virtually no pottery was found below a depth of 20 cm.

Figure 3 shows the depths to which each section of the excavation was taken.

Preservation of the Site

The SW sector of the site remains unexcavated, in order that later archaeologists may check on the stratigraphy and soil chemistry.

Immediately the excavation was completed the area was filled in entirely to prevent weathering. All stones which had been removed during the course of excavations were replaced in their original positions. The central stone is still (1974) buried *in situ*, but necessarily lies 10 cm deeper than it originally was.

Catalogue of Finds

Find 1

Torso of animal, pottery; max. length 8.7 cm; width 3.9 cm; height 4.0 cm; weight 184 gm. Found on the surface at 37 cm N, 28 W.

Find 2

Front of animal torso with two legs, pottery; max. height 4.2 cm; max. width at feet 3.6 cm; length 4.9 cm; weight 85 gm. Seven parallel

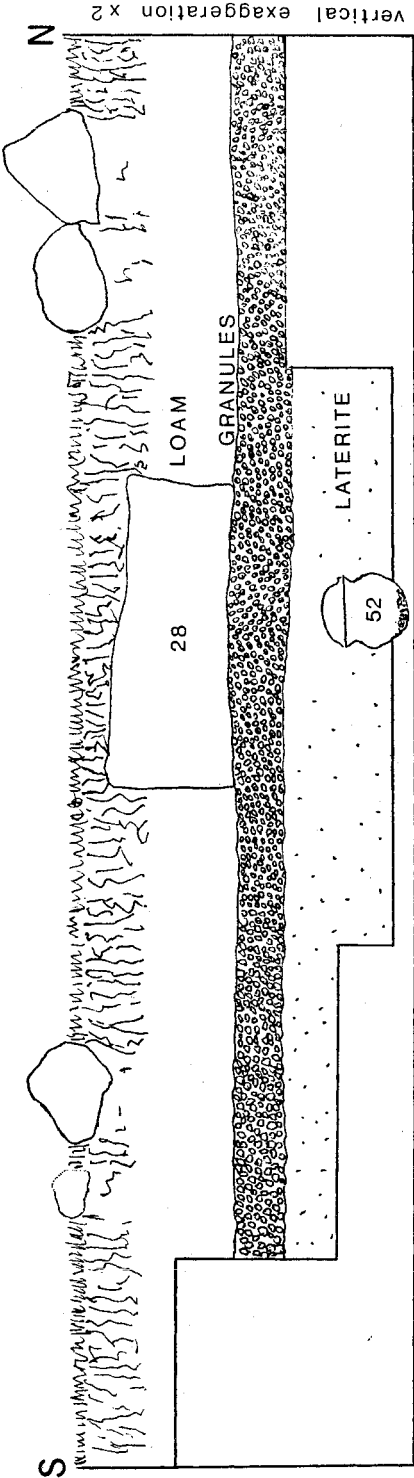


Fig. 3 Schematic cross-section of Circle E.

lines scratched diagonally across left side, three diagonally across chest, and crisscross scratchings on right side. Found on the surface at 19 cm N, 65 W.

Find 3

Head of animal, pottery; length 3.9 cm; max. width 2.8 cm; height 3.7 cm; weight 40 gm. Two deeply incised eyes, two incised nostrils, and incised mouth; ears broken off. Found on surface at 25 cm N, 11 E.

Find 4

Head of bird, pottery; length 4.6 cm; max. width 2.3 cm; max. height 1.7 cm; weight 20 gm. Incised eye on each side, with three lines running down each side of the neck, and three down the top of the neck. Found on the surface at 27 cm N, 65 E.

Find 5

Head of bird, pottery; max. length 5.2 cm; max. width 2.1 cm; max. height 2.3 cm; weight 33 gm. Two incised eyes and small incised beak; crisscross incisions on each side of the neck and five incisions running down the top of the neck. Found on the surface at 30 cm N, 110 E.

Found with it was the tip of a buffalo horn, pottery; max. length 2.2 cm; weight 4.5 gm.

Find 6

Fragment of animal torso, pottery; max. size $4.6 \times 2.6 \times 3.5$ cm; weight 55 gm. Semicircular double lines incised on each side and filled with 11 dots; other areas incised with parallel lines. Found on the surface at 68 cm N, 96 E.

Find 7

Buffalo horn, pottery; length 5.8 cm; square in section, max. width 1.3×1.3 cm; weight 24 gm. Found at 15 cm depth, at 25 cm N, 30 E.

Find 8

Part of animal head, pottery; max. height 4.3 cm; max. width 4.9 cm; max. depth from nose to back of head 4.2 cm; weight 52 gm. Incised mouth, eyes, and zigzag markings behind the eyes. Found on the surface at 3 cm S, 90 E.

Find 9

Head of animal, pottery; ears missing; max. height 4.5 cm; max. length of head 4.4 cm; max. width of head 2.4 cm; weight 48 gm. Four eyes deeply incised, two on each side; flat mouth area with very slight nostrils incised. Found on the surface at 3 cm S, 78 E.

Find 10

Buffalo horn, pottery; square in section; max. length 5.8 cm; max. width of section 1.4×1.4 cm; weight 20 gm. Found on surface at 2 cm N, 27 E.

Find 11

Head and front torso of animal, probably a buffalo, pottery; horns broken off; max. length 8.6 cm; max. width 3.8 cm; max. height 3.8 cm; weight 114 gm. Two deeply incised eyes; band of herringbone incision between two lines around girth; single central support but no sign of there having been legs. Found on the surface at 27 cm S, 73 E.

Find 12

Three pieces of pottery found together on the surface at 35 cm S, 5 W. (a) Neck of a handle or animal; max. size $4.1 \times 2.5 \times 2.5$ cm; weight 22 gm. (b) Base of a handle or bird; max. size $3.0 \times 4.5 \times 5.3$ cm; weight 59 gm. (c) Head of bird, pottery; max. height 4.8 cm; max. length of head 3.7 cm; max. width of neck 1.9 cm; weight 33 gm. Deeply incised eyes; also incised beak, lines of incision running down each side and down the back of neck; short parallel incisions running across the top of the head on either side of a central line.

Find 13

Headless bird on stand, pottery; max. height 7.1 cm; max. width at tail 5.7 cm; max. length 6.4 cm; weight 210 gm. Part of tail broken off; ten incisions running down the back, and panels of crisscross incisions on each side; short vertical incisions all round the base. Found on surface at 20 cm S, 0 cm W.

Find 14

Part of figurine, pottery; max. size $5.1 \times 4.2 \times 4.5$ cm; weight 81 gm. Several incised lines on each side. Found on surface at 112 cm S, 25 E.

Find 15

Head of bird, pottery; max. length 3.9 cm; max. length of head 2.6 cm; max. width of neck 1.9 cm; weight 15 gm. Three incised lines on each side of neck and down top of head; deeply incised eyes and beak; crosshatched incisions on back of neck. Found on surface at 73 cm S, 42 E.

Find 16

Part of animal torso, pottery; with it a small potsherd. Max. length of animal 6.3 cm; max. width at legs 3.9 cm; max. height at legs 3.5 cm; weight 85 gm. Incisions down back of torso, and

two legs discernible. Found on surface at 139 cm S, 43 E.

Find 17

Fragment of figurine, pottery; max. size $4.1 \times 4.4 \times 2.5$ cm; weight 50 gm. Found on surface at 30 cm N, 26 E.

Find 18

Hindquarters of animal, pottery; max. height 5.6 cm; max. width at base 5.8 cm; length along back 3.3 cm; weight 102 gm. Surface closely covered with impressed circles 0.6 cm in diameter, apparently made with a hollow plant stalk (Pl. III). Found at 15 cm depth, at 36 cm N, 31 E.

Find 19

Fragment of figurine, pottery; max. size $5.1 \times 2.5 \times 3.0$ cm; weight 46 gm. Six parallel lines incised on two sides. Found at 15 cm depth, at 52 cm N, 28 E.

Find 20

Buffalo horn, pottery; max. length 5.6 cm; horn square in section with concave sides; max. section 1.9×1.6 cm; weight 33 gm. Found at 17 cm depth, at 113 cm N, 32 W.

Find 21

Head of animal, pottery; max. length of head 4.7 cm; max. height at neck 4.8 cm; max. width at ears 3.2 cm; weight 59 gm. Ears or horns broken off; deeply incised ears, nostrils, and mouth, with two rows of incised herringbone patterns down each side of the face. Found at 13 cm depth, at 118 cm N, 23 cm W.

Find 22A

Part of animal torso, pottery; max. length 7.2 cm; max. width 2.9 cm; max. height at leg 4.5 cm; weight 76 gm. One hind leg and tail intact; incised sets of three concentric semicircular lines on each side and down one leg. Found at 13 cm depth, at 37 cm N, 44 W.

Find 22B

Tail of bird, pottery; max. length 7.0 cm; max. width 4.7 cm; max. depth 3.8 cm; weight 94 gm. Pattern of incised lines on upper surface and sides. Found with 22A at 13 cm depth, at 37 cm N, 44 W.

Find 23

Head of buffalo, pottery; max. height 7.9 cm; max. length from end of horn to nostrils 6.3 cm; max. thickness of neck 3.2 cm; weight 114 gm. Ears and part of one horn extant; two incised

concentric semicircular lines on each shoulder, and deeply incised eyes, nostrils, and mouth. Found at 15 cm depth, at 80 cm N, 75 W.

Find 24

Female torso, pottery; max. width at shoulders 4.5 cm; min. width at waist 2.5 cm; max. height 4.8 cm; min. thickness at waist 1.5 cm; max. thickness at breasts 1.9 cm; weight 44 gm. Arms, legs, and head missing. Two raised breasts in front, surrounded by impressed dots; below these crisscross impressions between two parallel lines running across the shoulders and hips; also an impressed navel; body very "flat," and no impression on the back (Pl. IV). Found at 18 cm depth, at 138 cm N, 13 W.

Find 25

Head of bird, pottery; probably a cockerel. Height 5.4 cm; length from front to back of head 5.1 cm; max. thickness of neck 1.9 cm; thickness at eyes 2.9 cm; weight 46 gm. Raised and incised eye on each side of flat head; incised mouth and comb, and double lines incised on three sides of each eye. Found at 21 cm depth, at 134 cm N, 12 W.

Find 26

Forty-nine fragments of a broken pot, incomplete. Weight 1220 gm. Section shown in diagram, where diagonal incisions occur around the body at the points indicated (Fig. 4). Wheelmade fabric; well-prepared, evenly fired siliceous clay. Approx. max. internal diameter 19 cm. The largest fragment is shown both in the plate and in the section diagram (Pl. V, *top*). Found at 18 cm depth, at 155 cm N, 37 E.

Find 27

Part of animal torso, pottery; max. length 7.2 cm; max. height 3.8 cm; max. width 2.9 cm; weight 101 gm. Surface closely covered with circles 0.6 cm in diameter, as on find 18 (Pl. III). Found at 11 cm depth, at 23 cm N, 67 E.

Find 28

Central stone, granite; rough rectangular block with no signs of tooling; overall length 115 cm, average width 35 cm. Thickness varies from 20 to 24 cm. Surface of the stone was reached at 15 cm depth. Coordinates of the four corners were 95 cm N, 19 W; 100 N, 16 E; 6 S, 25 W; 12 S, 15 E. Directly underneath the stone were three chips of whitish quartz crystal, together weighing 11 gm.

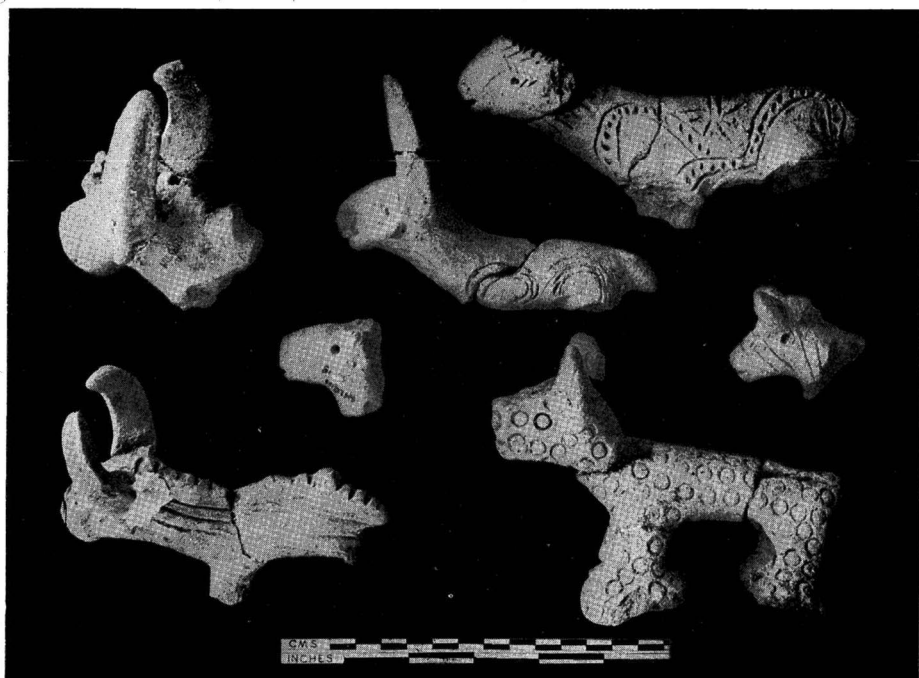


Plate III Minor finds, including leopard (*bottom right*) made up from nos. 18, 27, and 36.

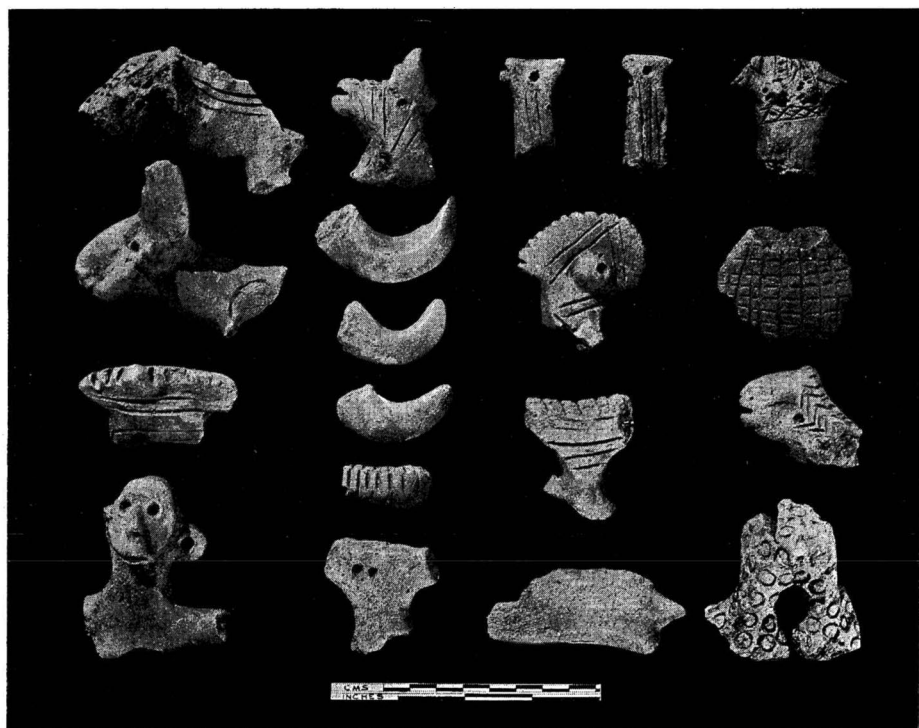


Plate IV Minor finds, including 24 (*top right*) and 45 (*bottom left*).

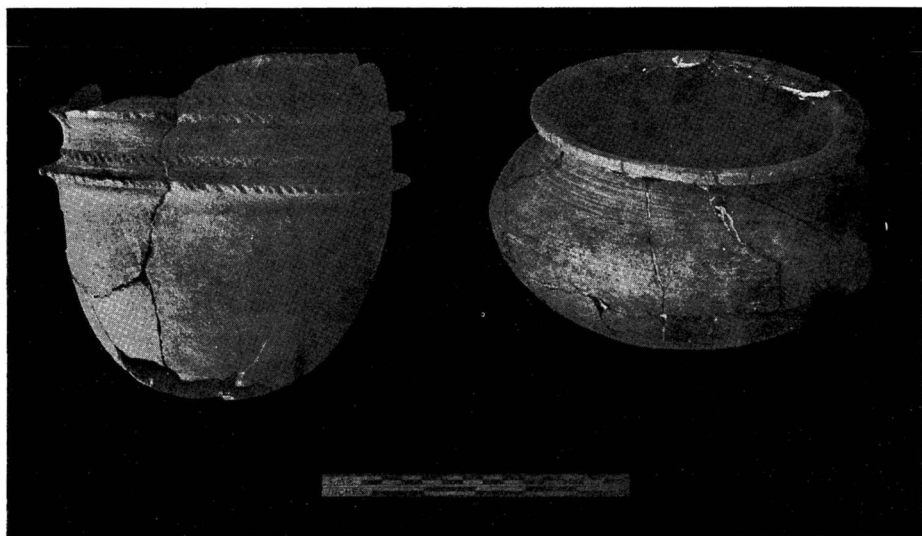
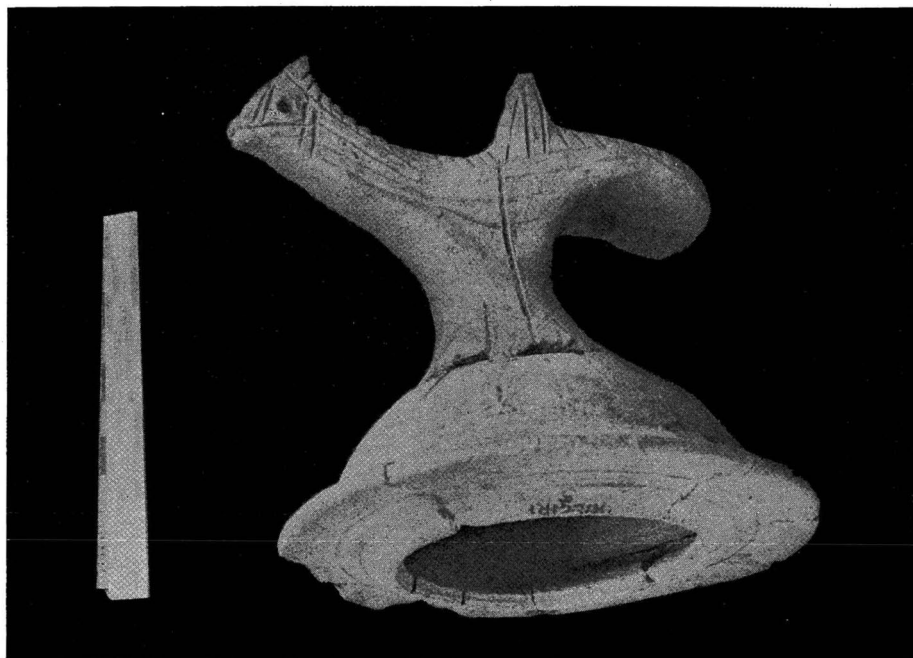


Plate V *top*, finds 26 (*left*) and 52A; *bottom*, finds 53 and 40.



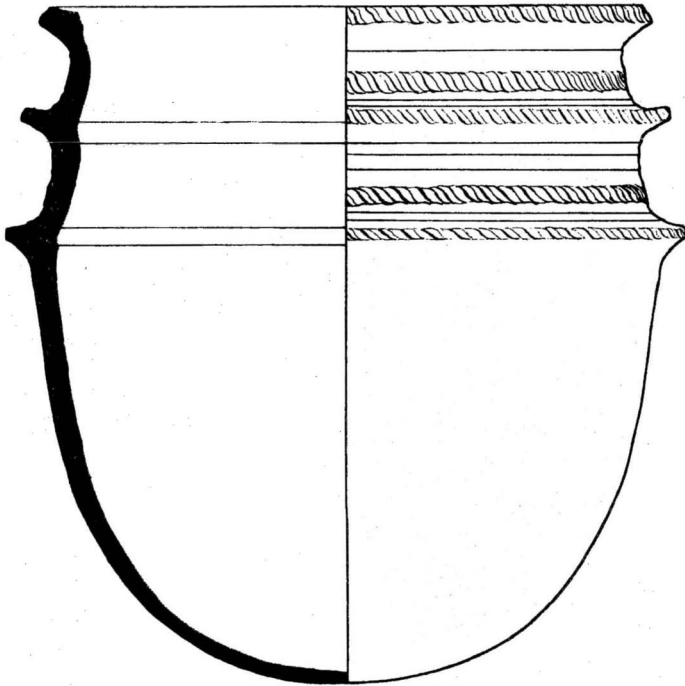


Fig. 4 Find 26.

Find 29

Head of animal, pottery; max. height 6.6 cm; max. width at horns 4.7 cm; max. length from end of horn to nostril 5.6 cm; neck thickness, front to rear, 2.9 cm; neck width 2.1 cm; weight 81 gm. Apparently a buffalo, as half the right horn is extant. Mouth and nostrils neatly incised; herringbone pattern incised on upper part of head; two eyes, 0.7 cm in diameter, neatly impressed with what appears to have been the hollow stalk of a plant. Found at 25 cm depth, at 87 cm N, 32 W.

Find 30

Pot handle, pottery; presumably the stand of an animal figurine; max. height 4.0 cm; max. diameter at base 4.7 cm; min. diameter 2.0 cm; weight 76 gm. Found at 20 cm depth, at 30 cm N, 30 W.

Find 31

Tail of bird, pottery; max. size $5.1 \times 4.8 \times 1.9$ cm; weight 45 gm. Incised decoration of parallel lines cutting at right angles, on upper surface only. Found at 21 cm depth, at 30 cm N, 24 W.

Find 32

Buffalo horn, pottery; max. length 3.9 cm; rectangular in section, max. 1.5×1.2 cm; weight 15 gm. Found at 20 cm depth, at 102 cm N, 6 E.

Find 33

Part of animal head, pottery; max. length from "ear" to nostril 4.6 cm; max. height 3.7 cm; weight 41 gm. Incised eyes, nostrils, and mouth, and the facial area covered with mainly vertical incisions each about 1 cm long; on top of the head a cylinder projecting about 0.5 cm, diameter 1.9 cm, with a central hole in the top 1.1 cm in diameter. Found at 23 cm depth, at 10 cm S, 30 W.

Find 34

Head of bird, pottery; possibly the local hoopoe (*Upupa indica*); max. length along crest 6.0 cm; max. height 4.8 cm; max. width at neck 1.8 cm; width at eyes 2.8 cm; weight 48 gm. Head flat, with peaked crest, and crisscross line incisions on either side of the head; eyes raised out from the head on either side, and incised; six straight lines down the neck broken by two horizontal lines below the eyes; small incised

beak, and herringbone incision down the crest. Found at 20 cm depth, at 23 cm S, 10 W.

(Find 35)

Renumbered 55 (q.v.)

Find 36

Head of dog or leopard, pottery; height to top of ear 5.0 cm; max. width 3.0 cm; max. length 5.3 cm; weight 64 gm. One ear missing; deeply incised mouth; whole surface except front of ear closely covered by impressed circles 0.7 cm in diameter, apparently done with the hollow stalk of a plant; both eyes and both nostrils also impressed with this (Pl. III). Found at 19 cm depth, at 50 cm N, 33 E.

Find 37

Head and neck of animal, pottery; with it ten potsherds weighing a total of 99 gm; also two small fragments from unidentifiable figurines, each of them weighing 9 gm. The animal head appears to be that of a buffalo; max. width at ears 4.1 cm; length of head 4.5 cm; max. width at nostrils 2.2 cm; length from end of neck to nostrils 8.8 cm; min. width of neck 2.4 cm; weight 122 gm. Both horns are missing, but part of the left foreleg is present; the head has deeply incised eyes, nostrils, and mouth; three parallel lines running down the upper part of the neck on each side of a roughly serrated backbone; a network of lines cutting at right angles, on top of the head. Found at 25 cm depth, at 106 cm N, 5 E.

Find 38

Head of bird, pottery; distance from crest to beak 2.1 cm; max. length 7.3 cm; max. width of neck 2.8 cm; max. thickness of neck 2.3 cm; weight 52 gm. Incised eyes, small beak, and circular crest; three lines incised along the top of the neck, and two on either side of it; the neck is rectangular in section. Found at 27 cm depth, at 105 N, 7 W.

Find 39

Head of animal, pottery; probably a buffalo, with horns missing. Diameter of front of face, at the nostrils, 2.8 cm; max. thickness of neck 3.4 cm; max. length 8.3 cm; max. width at ears 5.2 cm; weight 187 gm. Eyes, nostrils, mouth, and backbone roughly incised. Found at 28 cm depth, at 75 cm N, 25 W.

Find 40

Crushed lid of pot in nine pieces, under stone; diameter 13.3 cm; present height 5 cm;

interior diameter of rim 7.0 cm; weight 371 gm. Handle broken off, but subsequently discovered (find 53); scratched surface shows where the handle had been affixed; around this numerous vertical incised lines; pottery is wheelmade (Pl. V, bottom). Found at 25 cm depth, at 136 cm N, 15 E.

Find 41

Torso of animal, pottery; no head or legs; max. length 7.5 cm; max. height 3.2 cm; max. width 2.9 cm; weight 90 gm. Found at 17 cm depth, at 15 cm N, 30 E.

Find 42

Head of dog, pottery; max. width at ears 2.9 cm; max. length of head 4.0 cm; max. height 5.6 cm; weight 55 gm. Mouth and eyes incised, and surface covered with irregular incised lines. Found at 21 cm depth, at 28 cm N, 42 E.

Find 43

Buffalo horn, pottery; max. length 4.6 cm; max. thickness 1.8×1.5 cm; weight 20 gm. Found at 13 cm depth, at 25 cm N, 30 E.

Find 44A

Curved fragment, pottery; max. length 3.4 cm; max. thickness 1.7×1.3 cm; weight 15 gm. Incised with 3 ranks of short, parallel lines. Found with 44B at 26 cm depth, at 30 cm N, 33 W.

Find 44B

Bird's head, pottery; max. length 4.3 cm; length of head 2.0 cm; max. thickness of neck 1.6×1.6 cm; weight 19 gm. Incised eye, parallel lines down each side of neck, and criss-cross lines on the back of the neck. Found with 44A at 26 cm depth, at 30 cm N, 33 W.

Find 45

Bust of man, pottery; height 7.3 cm. Incised eyes, mouth, ear-holes, and one central nostril; arms and lower body broken off; high arched nose and huge, pendulous ears; flat body of same thickness as neck, 1.5 cm; face projects out on either side beyond the width of the head, suggesting either that it is a mask or that the figure has a beard on the cheeks and heavy brow-ridges; no signs of beard under the chin, however (Pl. IV). Length of face "mask," 2.8 cm; breadth 2.4 cm; length from chin to crown of head 3.7 cm; width at ears 4.0 cm; min. width of head 2.3 cm; length from nose to back of head 3.4 cm; length of nose 1.1 cm; width at shoulders 5.7 cm; weight 91 gm. Found at 14 cm depth, at 25 cm N, 30 E.

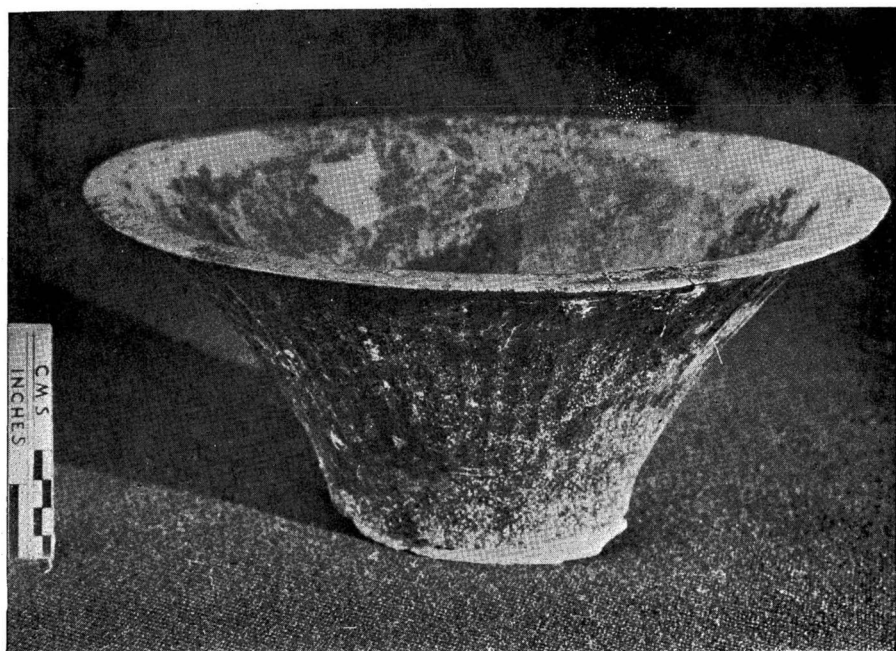
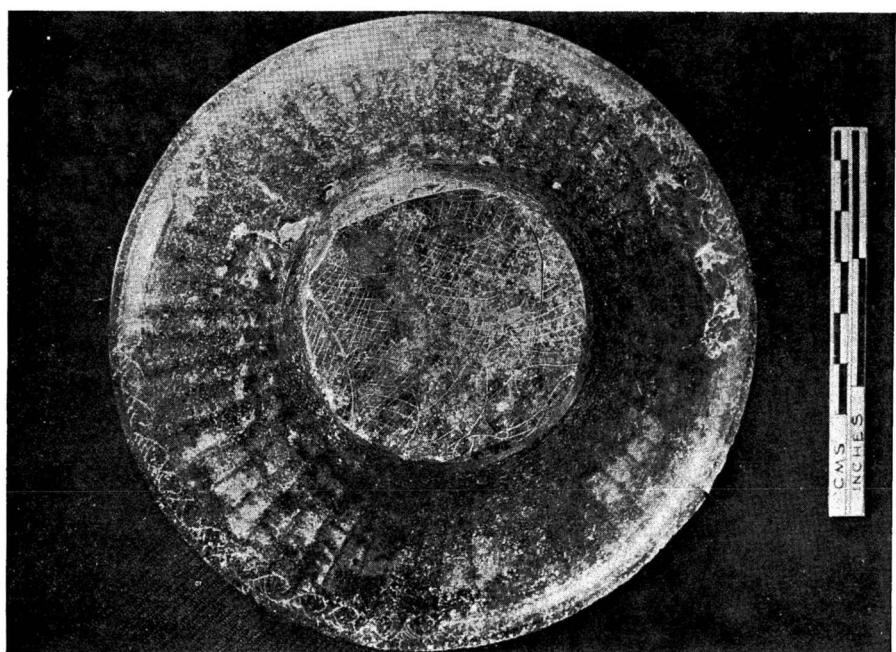


Plate VI Two views of find 48.



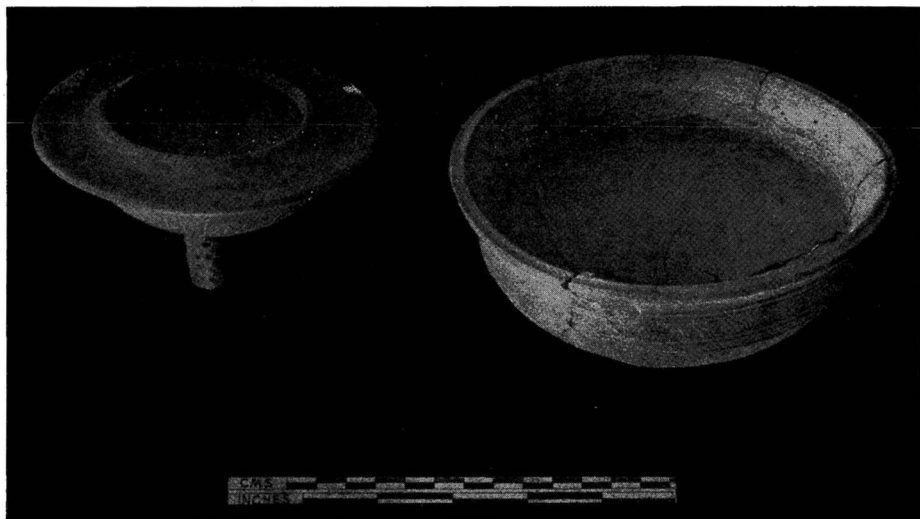


Plate VII top, finds 54 (left) and 51; bottom, find 54.



Find 46

Head of buffalo, pottery; max. length 5.2 cm; max. width at horns 5.1 cm; max. height 4.4 cm; flat muzzle area 3.2×1.8 cm; weight 96 gm. Horns and ears broken off; eyes, nostrils, lips, and backbone incised. Found at 29 cm depth, at 86 cm N, 22 W.

Find 47

Head of bird, probably a hoopoe, pottery; max. height 6.0 cm; max. width of neck 2.6 cm; max. thickness of neck 2.1 cm; length of crest 3.6 cm; width at eyes 2.5 cm; weight 51 gm. Three incised lines down each side of neck; crosshatched incisions down the back of it; eyes standing out from the sides of the head; crested head, with crest incisions and small beak. Found at 30 cm depth, at 28 cm N, 25 W.

Find 48

Bronze bowl. Base diameter 4.8 cm; rim diameter 12.7 cm; width of rim 0.6 cm; height 5.4 cm. Fifty-eight vertical flutings down outside of body, irregular because chiseled by hand. Base flat on the bottom but convex inside the vessel. Line of flutings ceases 1.5 cm above the bottom. Above the flutings a line of abstract decoration running around the vessel just below the rim; inside the rim four incised parallel lines running around the vessel (Pl. VI, *top*). On the bottom is incised an abstract design which perhaps includes a lotus flower (Pl. VI, *bottom*). This bowl had formerly been the base of a much larger bowl.

Find 49

Four connected links of a chain, gold (Fig. 5). Each link 0.6 cm in length, 0.2 cm wide at its widest part. Each link except for the last (broken) is made of an unbroken circle of gold wire, roughly 2.3 cm in circumference, which is about 0.04 cm in thickness. This object was found inside find 48, but there was no trace in the earth which find 48 contained of any other metallic or any organic materials. Naik found



Fig. 5 Find 49.

exactly comparable links in the Brecks collection (Naik 1966: pl. 23, nos. 215 and 216).

Find 50

Torso of animal, pottery; max. length 9.4 cm; max. width 3.7 cm; max. height at right front leg 5.3 cm; weight 183 gm. Head, legs, and tail broken off; underside very roughly modeled; body decorated with asterisk-like incisions on the right hindquarters and the left saddle; four incised lines, about 0.6 cm apart on the average, filled with a single line of dots roughly at 0.4 cm intervals. Found at 23 cm depth, at 8 cm N, 31 W.

Find 51

Complete pot-lid, inverted over find 52A, which it contacted at a depth of 53 cm. Thickness of rim 0.6 cm; overall diameter of lid 16.9 cm; height 7.0 cm; weight 438 gm (Fig. 6). Wheel-made vessel, well-fired and grit-free, but siliceous; concave rim-surface touching the pot below; a small hole, but no trace of any handle, in the center of the lid, 0.6 cm in diameter, perhaps made for passage of the soul; outer surface and 2.0 cm of the inner surface above the rim washed with a buff-colored clay before firing; otherwise the pottery is brick-red (Pl. VII, *top*). Coordinates at the central hole, 62 cm N, 45 W.

Find 52A

Complete pot containing organic remains, standing upright on its rounded base. Diameter of mouth 14.0 cm; outer diameter of rim 17.3 cm; max. outer diameter of pot 21.1 cm; height 12.1 cm; weight 1015 gm (Fig. 7). Same well-fired siliceous pottery as the lid, wheelmade;

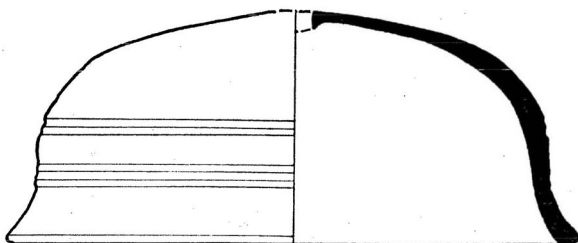


Fig. 6 Find 51.

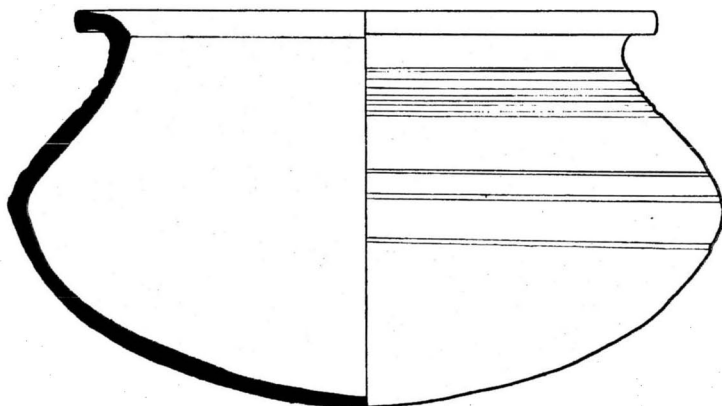


Fig. 7 Find 52A.

four lines incised round the bulge, and 5 more just below the everted rim (Pl. V, *top*); the whole vessel thinly washed with buff clay before firing, and over a brick-red pottery. An irregular patch of black on the bottom, about 8×10 cm, probably caused not in the firing but by holding it over a fire before use. Coordinates at center of vessel, 62 cm N, 45 W.

Find 52B

Carbonized organic contents of find 52A. Dry weight, 93 gm; of this, only 4.5 gm was identifiable as bone, the largest piece of which was only 1.2×0.4 cm in size, and so totally unidentifiable.

Find 53

Complete bird, pottery; overall length 12.4 cm; max. height to crest 9.4 cm; max. width at tail 5.0 cm; width at "saddle" ridge 4.4 cm; height to "saddle" ridge 8.4 cm; length of head 3.2 cm; width at eyes 1.3 cm; weight 265 gm (Pl. VIII). This bird served as a pot-lid handle, and attaches to the top of find 40. Incised lines from face running along sides and top of neck, back, and tail; one line down each side of the single stand, and many around the bottom where it joins to find 40; incised eyes and small beak; two pairs of parallel lines across the back, one on either side of the upstanding "saddle"; herringbone crest incised on head (Pl. V, *bottom*). Found at 25 cm depth, at 148 cm N, 20 E.

Find 54

Lid of pot, almost complete; height 8.1 cm; overall diameter 14.0 cm; internal diameter of rim 7.5 cm; handle, average section size 1.6×1.6 cm; weight 455 gm. Decorated with vertical and

crisscross lines on the upper surface; handle square in section, with one line up the middle of each side; between these four lines, rows of dots extending to the bottom of the handle; apart from the handle, fabric and design exactly as with find 40 (Fig. 8, Pl. VII). Found at 24 cm depth, at 125 cm N, 14 E.

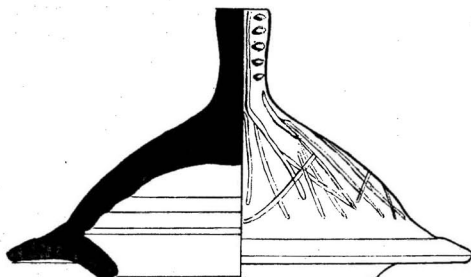


Fig. 8 Find 54.

Find 55

Part of animal torso, pottery; max. length 6.0 cm; max. height 3.7 cm; max. width 3.0 cm; weight 68 gm. Serrations along the back, and incised lines along each side; stumpy tail in position, but legs missing. Found at 17 cm depth, at 15 cm N, 30 E.

Find 56

Buffalo horn, pottery; square in section, max. size 1.5×1.5 cm; max. length 5.6 cm; weight 31 gm. Found at 27 cm depth, at 78 cm N, 106 W.

Find 57

Part of bird, pottery; max. height 6.2 cm; max. length 6.1 cm; max. width at tail 3.6 cm; weight 131 gm. Served as handle to pot-lid; tail

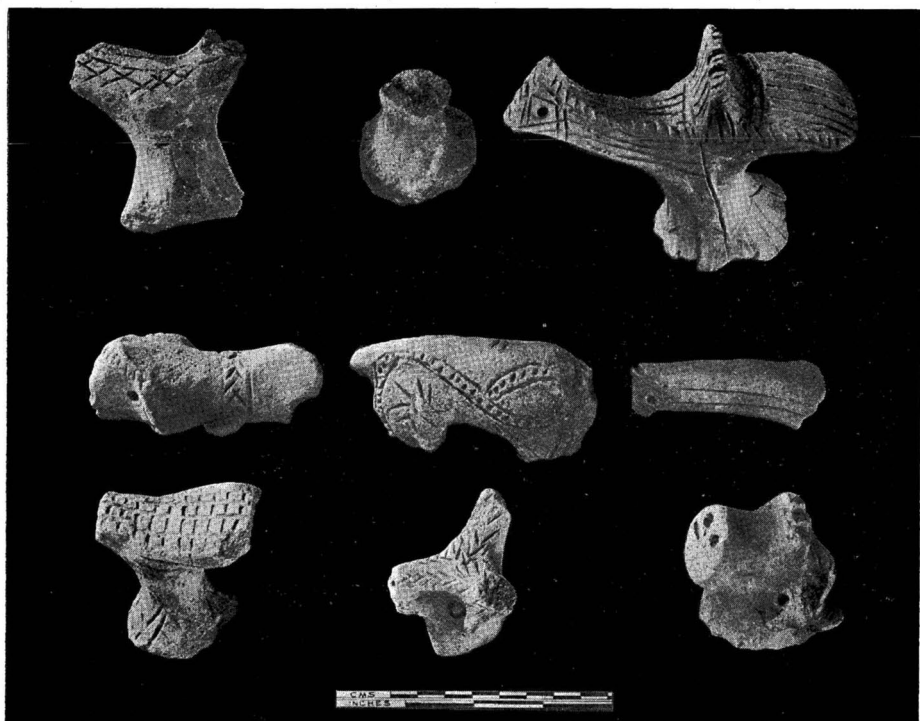


Plate VIII Minor finds, including 53 (*top right*).

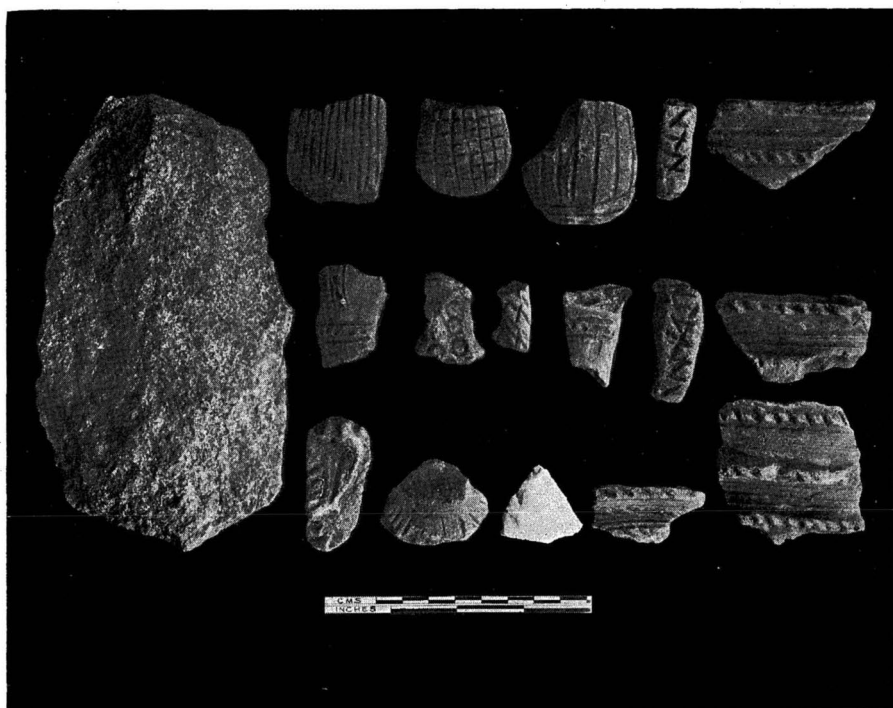


Plate IX Numbers 101 (*left*), 108, and other minor finds.

and head broken off; back covered with cross-hatch incisions, and 3 lines running along each side; numerous incisions on the lower half of the stand, running up from the lid itself. Found at 15 cm depth, at 0 cm N, 65 W.

Find 58

Part of bird, pottery; max. length 4.2 cm; max. height 4.6 cm; max. width of back 2.2 cm;

weight 55 gm. Head and tail missing; incised lines along either side, and crosshatching along the back. Found at 23 cm depth, at 7 cm N, 84 W.

Find 59

Buffalo horn, pottery; rectangular section, max. size 1.6×1.1 cm; max. length 4.4 cm; weight 16 gm.

Minor Finds

Some finds listed below are illustrated in Plate IX.

Surface level (0–10 cm)

101. A rough flake of the local granite, with what appears to be a percussion point and a low bulb of percussion; both edges apparently worn down with cutting, and the point broken off. Overall size as in Plate IX; max. thickness 3.1 cm.

102, 103, 104. Three tails of birds, broken off; pottery.

105, 106, 107. Portions of three buffalo horns, pottery.

108. Chip of shiny white quartzite crystal, see Plate IX.

109. Sample of a slag found in patches on the surface, and apparently indicating something—perhaps the corpse—had been burnt on the surface.

The surface level (0–10 cm depth) also contained 33 fragments of unidentifiable figurines in pottery. The total weight of pottery fragments recovered from the surface level, including the minor finds listed above but excluding the major finds whose weights have been given previously, was 8710 gm.

Level 2 (10–20 cm)

110, 111. Fragments from the tails of two birds, pottery.

112, 113, 114. Fragments of three buffalo horns, pottery.

115. Head of a bird, probably a hoopoe; max. length of head 3.7 cm. Incised eyes, beak, and crest; six lines on the left side, but none on the right.

Level 2 (10–20 cm depth) also yielded 11 fragments of unidentifiable pottery figurines. The total weight of pottery fragments from Level 2, including the minor finds listed here but excluding the major ones listed previously, was 3250 gm.

Level 3 (20–30 cm), West Extension

116, 117. Two fragments of buffalo horns, pottery.

118, 119. Two small chips of shiny white quartzite crystal.

This extension of Level 3 also yielded 15 fragments of unidentifiable pottery figurines. Exclusive of the major finds but inclusive of the minor pottery finds listed here, Level 3, West Extension, yielded 5400 gm of potsherds.

Level 3, East Extension

120, 121. Two fragments of buffalo horns, pottery.

122. Tiny chip of shiny white quartzite crystal.

Also found in this extension were three fragments of unidentifiable pottery figurines. The East Extension, including the pottery listed above but excluding the major finds, produced 1680 gm of potsherds.

Level 3, North Extension

This extension yielded two small fragments of unidentifiable figurines, in pottery. The total amount of pottery recovered from this extension, exclusive of major finds, weighed 420 gm.

Level 4 (30–40 cm), West Extension

123–131. Nine chips of yellowish-white quartzite crystal. Of these, only find 123 is a large lump, weighing 235 gm.

Also three small fragments of unidentifiable pottery figurines were found in this extension. The total weight of pottery for this extension, including these three minor fragments but excluding the major finds, was 1430 gm.

Level 4, East Extension

132, 133. Two chips of shiny yellowish quartzite.

The extension also contained a fragment of an unidentifiable pottery figurine. This extension, including the above fragment but excluding major finds, yielded a total of 61 gm of sherds.

Level 4, North Extension

This extension, exclusive of major finds, yielded a weight of 72 gm in potsherds.

Level 5 (40–50 cm), West Extension

The West Extension, exclusive of major finds, yielded a total of 68 gm of potsherds.

CONCLUSION

A. Origins of the Megalithic Subculture

Several earlier scholars have looked at the Nilgiri stone circles in the hope of identifying their builders. For want of any epigraphic evidence, these writers have cast around for a local tribe that might have left these remains. King (1870: 31–32, 43), for example, attributed the circles to the Todas, but the “kistvaens” to the Kotas. Metz (1864: 124–125) and Shortt (1868: 45) both attributed the barrows to the Kurumbas; indeed, Metz was cautioned by a Badaga headman not to open a cairn because it was the residence of a Kurumba god. The most commonly mentioned tribe is the Toda, although some authors have pointed out that the Todas themselves neither venerate the burial sites nor claim all of them as the work of their ancestors (Grigg 1880: 239; Gururaja Rao 1972: 104, 271). As early as 1822 Ward was told that the monuments “were built by the Boopalans, predecessors of the present race of the Toduwars” [Todas] (Francis 1908: 97). Congreve, one of the first archaeologists to attack the Nilgiri sites, noted that “In the course of a conversation I recently had with a Thautawar [Toda] of considerable intelligence, I gathered that his people fully believed the cairns were constructed by their forefathers” (1847: 90). Apart from this concern over the builders, there has been little attempt either to discuss variations in funerary practice within the Nilgiris or to link this culture with other parts of South India. For the modern archaeologist these latter two are the more significant questions in need of analysis. We will return to the question of who built the Nilgiri circles in Section G.

B. Funerary Practices

There are found on the Nilgiri plateau three distinct types of cinerary burial. The commonest have been likened (by Congreve initially) to draw wells, because of the low stone wall, oval in plan, which surmounts the burial. Others, including our present example, consist of a barrow—a slight mound of earth (since weathered) surrounded by a rough circle, from 2 to 10 m in diameter, of unhewn stone slabs half embedded in the ground. In some cases these burials have a central mound surrounded by several rings of such large and rough stones. Lastly, there are those structures which Congreve and others called kistvaens, underground stone chambers. These are rough cists made of cut stone slabs, generally 110 × 75 cm in area and perhaps 75 cm in height. In one end-stone of this cist a round hole was cut, usually 30 to 40 cm in diameter. As we shall see, it was more recently used when a pebble was placed inside in memory of a dead Kurumba:

The Kurumbas and Irulas . . . , after every death amongst them, bring a long water-worn stone (*devva kotta kallu*) and put it into one of the old cromlechs sprinkled over the [Nilgiri] plateau. Some of the larger of these have been found piled up to the capstone with such pebbles . . . the Kurumbas in the neighbourhood of the Rangasvāmi peak and Barliar burn their dead, and place a bone and a small round stone in the sāvu-mane (death-house)—an old cromlech. (Walhouse 1877: 41)

Although we have no very thorough study of Kurumba death practices, their continuity with those of the ancient culture is apparent.

The culture delineated by Nilgiri grave-goods would not have been inappropriate to these people a millennium ago. The terracottas include riders on horseback and, in one case, on a saddled elephant (Naik 1966: 196; British Museum no. 79-12-1 (54)); buffaloes, oxen, horses, dogs, pigs, and fowl are also depicted. The pottery is in part wheelmade, and the metallurgy in bronze and wrought iron is quite sophisticated. Of the latter implements it is important to note that weapons are far more numerous than tools, and that these tools—sickles and knives—do not have to connote real agriculture, but merely jungle collecting activities or swidden gardening similar to what the modern Kurumbas do.

Because of the rarity of his report, it will perhaps be useful to present some examples of the many representative sites excavated by Breeks.

In 1871, at Kunhakkilabetta, Breeks found a *cairn* with “an old half-decayed tree” growing out of the middle of it (1873: 76). Directly under this tree, “which measured 9 ft. 2 ins. in circumference at three feet from the ground,” were two slabs of stone, both lying NE-SW. Breeks justly concluded a considerable antiquity for the site.

Cairn B, on Nadubetta, near Bikkipatti Mand, had a central slab lying NNE-SSW. It contained a considerable amount of pottery and figurines, including three rough human figures which Breeks unconvincingly describes as “Buddhist in character” (1873: 78). At some depth in this cairn was a fine pot “containing a razor with marks of cloth round it, and a small iron implement, bones, and earth. Also a handsome bronze vase on stand, inverted . . . , with an iron sickle or knife laid round it” (Breeks 1873: 78).

A similar cairn near Tuneri (Breeks 1873: 74) contained at a depth of some 2 ft several bronze bowls as well as an iron spearhead and an iron sickle. There is no reason to believe that bronze and iron are not contemporaneous at this site. Another cairn of the same form, 20 yards SW of the above, also held a small iron sickle and the usual fragments of broken pottery (Breeks 1873: 74). In this second case the three central slabs all lay NE-SW, and this was also true of a cairn Breeks excavated at Gulicholabetta (Hulisolabetta) (1873: 75).

He also excavated a cairn at Yeresibetta, near Kentore (1873: 78-79). This had four large and three smaller slabs inside it, all lying NE-SE. It contained several bronze bowls and much pottery, that pottery near the surface being broken up. Under one of these slabs were an iron spearhead, a sickle, and a knife. Other iron materials were found elsewhere in the burial.

A cairn excavated in 1872, west of Dunsandle, contained “two small slabs almost due N. and S.” Its other contents were a razor, a sickle, some bits of bronze, and broken pottery (Breeks 1873: 79).

These are summaries of some of the sketchy reports of Breeks' excavations. Altogether he examined 27 cairns. They each contained a few long stone slabs lying parallel to each other near the surface in the center. These varied in number from 1 to 7, and in direction from NNW-SSE to NE-SW, most of them being at the latter position.

There was usually a fair amount of broken pottery on the surface, undoubtedly some of it trampled by grazing buffaloes, while at depths of 30–90 cm there would be a few bronze bowls, some pottery with animal or human figurines as lid handles, and sometimes iron implements as well. One bowl, like our no. 48, contained a piece of gold wire; other gold rings and beads were also found. In some cases the circle was marked by a "draw-well" ring of stones built up to a height of 60–100 cm. In other cases, as with ours, there was a rough circle of unhewn rocks barely rising above ground level.

The *barrows* differ in shape from cairns: a central mound surrounded by a ditch, in which there was occasionally a stone circle. But still the central slab of stone, lying roughly NE-SW, was present. The range of grave goods was also comparable with that of the cairns, both in materials and in styles. Bronze, iron, and gold items were found, together with much pottery and a number of terracotta figurines that had served as lid-handles.

If there is any difference between the funerary culture represented in the cairns and that in the barrows, it is that in some of the barrows the cremated remains appear to have been buried loose in a hole. Other barrows, however, have the remains in a pot that is of the same ware as Breeks found in the cairns. He excavated eleven barrows in various parts of the plateau. We can only concur with his general description of the cairns and barrows, a description which fits our own case too.

Above and between the slabs, which in a great majority of cases lie NE and SW exactly as if they had been placed by compass, and round the circle near the surface, lie the rough pots . . . , large deep narrow vessels, pointed at the bottom, so that they cannot stand upright, with rough figures of men and animals on the lid, and empty, or containing only earth, as far as their almost invariably broken state allows us to judge. The number of these is surprising . . . in most cases they lie so near the surface penetrated by the roots of trees and bushes that nothing but fragments can be recovered. Below, at depths varying from one to four feet, are the cinerary urns, superior in quality and make.

There does not seem to be any rule as to the arrangement of the actual interments. Sometimes the bones are at the bottom of the urn, sometimes in a bronze vase contained in it, sometimes under the inverted bronze. Often the bronze is not in or near the urn. Some of the urns do not contain bones, but only implements and ornaments, and some only earth. Sometimes the number of interments corresponds with that of the slabs; but this does not occur often enough to prove design. (Breeks 1873: 73; Grigg 1880: 236)

Breeks goes on to show how there are slight regional variations between the cairns of Western Todanad, Eastern Todanad, and Paranginad (1873: 94–95).

The *kistvaens*, or porthole cist graves, are located only in one part of the Nilgiris, on the northeast slopes, and are all very similar in construction. One, which Breeks considered representative, he described as

surrounded by a circle of single stones 18 feet in diameter. Four large slabs were standing edgewise in the ground, (natural soil, not vegetable earth or refuse) their tops just level with the surface of the ground; another large slab lay at the bottom. The covering slab had been removed and was lying outside the circle.

The earth inside the kist was mixed with charcoal, and was loose vegetable soil; the outside undisturbed, as if a square hole had been dug and the slabs put in.

The kist measured three feet six inches from E. to W., and two feet six inches from N. to S. In the middle of the eastern slab was a round hole, varying in different instances from 12 to 15 inches in diameter. The kistvaens had all been rifled. . . . (Breeks 1873: 106)

Breeks excavated some of them, nevertheless, and found a dagger and some fragments of pottery. The pottery was thick, highly glazed, and quite different from the ware found in the cairns.

C. Jewelry

Advanced metallurgical techniques are evidenced in the jewelry: repoussé, casting, wire-drawing, soldering, granulation, filigree and stone-setting (Naik 1966: 227-229). Gold, carnelian, bronze, and agate were all used in the varied items that have been found. Our own small specimen of gold wire is paralleled by one in the British Museum: "A fragment of broken loop-in-loop chain" (Naik 1966: 232; her no. 216).

D. Nilgiri Bronzes

Considerable confusion has been wrought by F. J. Richards' suggestion (1931: 203-204) that Nilgiri bronze bowls bear a resemblance to some gold ones from the Royal Graves at Ur (ca. 2600 B.C.). No theory of culture lag would explain the gross disparity in dates between the two occurrences, however, and we must consider the rough similarity as fortuitous.

The bowl from our own excavation (no. 48) is of bronze, and would bear some resemblance to fluted bowls from Ur, were we to disregard the fact that it is merely the *stand* of a much larger bowl. Das (1957: Pl. VI) in fact found a complete bowl with a similar stand, and there are several other examples in Breeks' collection. A site he excavated in 1871 near Ebgōdu Mand, for instance, had two rectangular stone slabs in the center of the cairn, oriented NE-SW, and beside them some pottery and two bronze bowls, namely: "Bronze vase on stand, small, the inside of a beautiful mottled green colour, containing earth and a thin piece of gold wire . . . [and] A bronze vase inverted, on a stand, fluted, and very prettily chased inside" (Breeks 1873: 73).

The collection he sent to the British Museum includes a specimen very similar to ours, Naik's no. 196, described by her as "Ht. 1½" . . . Bronze vase stand (separated from the vase) conical in shape and hollow inside. . . . In addition has traced and punched lotus petal pattern on the base" (1966: 225). If this "base" was in fact the inside of the original unbroken bowl, then even the lotus design parallels our own find. Leshnik provides an excellent illustration of a complete bowl, with the same lotus pattern on the central medallion (1970: 93, figs. 13-14).

Many sites excavated by Breeks, Walhouse, and others produced bronzes, a feature which sets them apart from the bronze-scarce burials of the South Indian plains. In addition to bronze bowls, the Nilgiri sites produced incense burners, cosmetic jars, mirrors, and stands. Equally important in many of the burials were wrought iron implements, including daggers, swords, arrowheads, javelins, spearheads, sickles, and knives.

E. Nilgiri Pottery

From this site and all others on the Nilgiri plateau, pottery is by far the commonest artifact. The comparatively smaller number of bronze vases, coupled with our observation that partial vases were also sometimes buried, certainly suggests that pottery was locally made and quite accessible, whereas bronze was imported from elsewhere (where tin was available) and was highly valued.

The pots are of a light reddish clay which contains some fine sand and traces of mica on the surfaces. Vessels are partly hand-modeled and partly thrown on a slow wheel. The base of a vessel is generally hemispherical in shape, and made by hand; it shows no rilling lines, in contrast with the upper part, which has often been turned on a slow wheel. These pots were probably fired slowly at a low temperature, as evidenced by the black fabric inside a section of sherd. Since they were presumably made locally at an elevation of 6000 to 7000 feet, available woods would have made it very difficult to produce a really hot kiln. Some pots were sprinkled with mica (mined in the nearby Wainad) to produce a sparkling surface; others have a smooth red surface, produced by rubbing with hematite (found on the plateau near Ootacamund) while the unfired surface was wet. "The clay from which the pots are made does not appear to be different from that used by the Kota potters, in the region at the present day. The Kota potter collects his clay from the nearby swamps. It is noted by K. de B. Codrington that the pottery is akin to the Kota pottery, which is also coarse" (Naik 1966: 149).

In her dissertation Naik offers a reliable classification of the shapes of vessels from all of the Nilgiri sites; it need not be repeated here. We should add that this pottery, although akin to modern Kota fabrics, is unlike any we find in the peninsular Iron Age. Neither the polished black ware nor the ubiquitous black-and-red ware is found on the Nilgiris. The closest parallel in shape to our vessel no. 26 is one in the Foote Collection numbered 264-h-4 which is only described as "Polished red vase with oval base from a Kurumbar grave at Talya, Holalkere taluq, Mysore" (Foote 1916: 210 and pl. 24). (This is 96 km southwest of Brahmagiri, and 280 km north of the Nilgiri plateau.) With it was found a bowl of the same shape as our cinerary urn no. 52A, which Foote numbered 264-h-3 and described as "Black and red polished lotah-shaped funereal urn with burnt human bones and one incisor tooth" (1916: 210 and pl. 25).

Of distinct importance is Foote's regrettably rough description of that burial, for he identifies it as one of "a small group of Kurumbar rings" and shows it to have had much the same form as our Paikara example.

On clearing away about 4 feet of soil a rudely oblong clumsy slab of white granite was exposed, but no other slabs occurred in the grave to make up a cist. . . . On digging down about 2 feet below the slab a small black pot was found

and then a very large chatty-shaped vessel which had lost its neck and was much crushed, apparently by the weight of the slab. . . . There was nothing in the soil which filled the big vessel and which I examined very carefully. Below the great chatty I came upon a small black chatty or large lotah half full of calcined human bones, amongst which was a lower incisor tooth. A little further down was a tall red pot. . . . It is numbered 264*h*-3. . . . Of the nine vessels that I found in the grave six were practically entire . . . [and the remaining three were much crushed.] (Foote 1916: 67)

We shall return to this close and important cultural parallel shortly.

F. Chronology

Analysis of the various Nilgiri excavations has shown that there were three distinct types of burial, all of them for crematory ashes. We cannot say that these three types are of different periods, nor that they form a developmental sequence, nor indeed that they all belong to the same period. It is quite certain from the ethnography of the modern Badagas that they consider their ancestors in no way responsible for these burials. Badaga oral history is generally reliable for the period from the eighteenth century onward (during which time it can be checked against other sources). We may at any rate feel confident that the burials predate the arrival of the earliest Badagas on the hills in the sixteenth century, at the break-up of the Vijayanagar Empire.

A rough *terminus post quem* is provided by the presence of iron objects in many burials of all three types. The Iron Age began in this part of India roughly in the third century B.C. As Wheeler notes while talking about South India in general: "There is no reason for ascribing [iron-bearing civilization] to a period earlier than the third century BC, and, at something more than a guess, it can be associated with the southward extension of the Mauryan Empire by Bindusāra, father of Ashoka, at the beginning of that century" (Wheeler 1966: 130). We may safely assume that this civilization, characterized by Ashokan law, iron implements, and the black-and-red ware, did not affect the Nilgiri plateau until some decades, perhaps even several centuries, after it reached the important town of Brahmagiri in northern Mysore.

At about this time, though not necessarily connected with the above-mentioned sociopolitical movements, a megalithic culture was extant in Mysore. Seshadri concludes that "The megalithic period ranges from the 6th century B.C. to the 1st century A.D." (1956: 72). Here he too is referring to the Mysore Plain rather than the Nilgiri plateau, where a somewhat later date can be expected, but where dating remains quite imprecise. (Sahney, in her useful survey of South India [1965], sees no reason to begin the Iron Age before the fifth century B.C., hence would modify Seshadri's estimate for Mysore.)

My survey of Brecks' descriptions and the photographs of excavated materials leads to four general conclusions:

- a. The culture of the people who practiced cinerary burial in the Nilgiri cairns was a homogeneous one—as it is represented in grave materials. This does not necessarily mean that it covered only a short span of years.

- b. The Paikara site clearly belongs in this culture, which we may consider Kurumba or proto-Toda.
- c. All burial was cinerary: there are no instances of bodily inhumation, as is common on the plains.
- d. There were nevertheless three styles of burial.

Our impressions about the relative dating of the Nilgiri culture can only be based on stylistic parallels with artifacts from elsewhere in southern India. Some specific instances:

1. The *kiriṭa-makuṭa* has been described by Gopinatha Rao (1971: 29) as a conical cap sometimes ending in an ornamental top. Most of the stone and bronze figures of South India which have it date to the sixth century A.D. or a little later. That same hat is seen on some Nilgiri pottery figures (Naik 1966: 102).
2. Wheeler has pointed to the parallel between iron sickles in the Nilgiri burials and those found at Brahmagiri, Adichanallur, and Kil-mondambadi, in both "pre-Andhra" and "Andhra" levels. Some of the Nilgiri pottery and iron tanged knives are also roughly paralleled by "Andhra" types of that Early Historical period, that is, first to third century A.D. (Wheeler 1947-48: 254). (Field tools such as these are notoriously conservative in their shapes, however.)
3. Nilgiri wrought-iron daggers with pommel, guard, and a bar pommel have parallels in sculpted daggers of the seventh century at Mahābalipuram, held by the demon Mahiśāsura (Zimmer 1955: pl. 280). These sculptures were the work of Pallava artisans.
4. The finding of a piece of silk on Pongibetta Hill, one of Brecks' sites, is useful only in giving us a very rough *terminus post quem* of 1200 B.C., the period when raw silk is first reported from another Central India site (Brecks 1873: 92; Allchin and Allchin 1968: 197, 264).
5. A reason for attributing the Paikara inhumation to about the eighth century A.D. is that it contained a female figurine in pottery (no. 24) which bore a necklet similar to one in the Brecks collection at the British Museum (Naik's no. 55). This latter necklet circles the bosom and hangs down to the navel. Its importance for us rests in the parallel to be found on a Pallava carving of Gaja Lakshmi at Mahābalipuram, near Madras, which has been dated to the seventh century on stylistic grounds (Zimmer 1955: pl. 280). Owing to our failure to obtain uncontaminated material for a radiocarbon testing in the Paikara site, this particular terracotta provides the most reliable clue we have to date the site.
6. Previous workers have emphasized that the pottery from the Nilgiri burials differs so much in fabric, shape, and decoration from that found in the typical urn burials, terracotta sarcophagi, and stone cists of South India that all slight parallels are of dubious value in dating the Nilgiri pottery (Nayar 1931: 135; Aiyappan 1946: 180; Sahney 1965: 147). Nonetheless one Nilgiri

funerary potsherd bore markings which proved to be Brahmi characters, dated in this instance to the first century A.D. (Das 1957: 148). In the Paikara site, furthermore, we have seen close parallels in the shape of pottery vessels that link this culture with that of Kurumbas in Mysore.

7. An important additional dating to mention is one recently obtained by the radiocarbon method from pottery excavated on the Nilgiris by Das (GIF-2345): it yielded a date of 910 ± 90 years B.P., that is, around the eleventh century A.D.

We may now suggest, as a hypothesis rather than a certainty, that the Paikara pit-grave reported here dates to about the eighth century A.D. The tenuousness of this suggestion must be emphasized, however, especially as we feel that the Nilgiri megalithic subculture as a whole could span the entire first millennium and perhaps even a period from roughly 300 B.C. to A.D. 1200. Srinivasan in fact claims that the burials—but not specifically the Nilgiri ones—are referred to in Tamil literature spanning that period (1944: 112). For several burials in the Nilgiris, none of them systematically excavated, we do have *termini post quem* afforded by Roman coins. One such coin is definitely datable to the fourth century A.D. (Srinivasan and Bannerjee 1953: 112). It was found in an Ootacamund burial, and has been described in considerable detail as a gold aureus of the Roman Byzantine series (Hough 1829: 82).

In opting for this eighth-century date for the Paikara site, our findings are not at odds with those of Naik, whose sketchy survey of the Nilgiri burials led her to place them within the period A.D. 700–1100 (1966: 143). She also recognizes the parallels we have mentioned between certain Nilgiri artifacts and sculpted ones of the seventh century at Mahābalipuram, but apparently—and justifiably—allows some generations of culture lag before art forms current on the east coast were manifest in the Nilgiri sites. Nor is our dating at odds with anything in Sahney's survey: she concludes only that the Nilgiri burial materials are not similar to what is known of the South Indian Iron Age at the major excavated sites, and are almost certainly later (i.e., than the first century A.D.) (Sahney 1965: 145–148; Gururaja Rao 1972: 104).

G. *The Builders of the Cinerary Burials*

A rough survey of the distribution of sites on the plateau reveals some curious local differences. Of the sites examined by Brecks—which constitute the large majority of all those reported on—circles with no large slabs in the center are confined almost entirely to a small tract to the north of the town of Kotagiri. Draw-well cairns are found only at the other end of the plateau, western Todanad, in the downland area lying to the west of the road which links Ootacamund with the Sigūr Pass. Throughout both of these tracts and the area in between, however, Brecks found numerous cairns with one or more stone slabs in the middle of them. But even in this latter type of burial Brecks detected some local variability. Those, like the Paikara site, lying west of the Sigūr Road were characterized by a different type of pottery: the figurines were large and heavy in style, their shapes clumsy and unnatural, and their color dark and dull. Cinerary urns were of inferior make, and their shape was different from those found elsewhere. The fabric rarely showed

traces of mica, and was generally coarse. All of these features contrast with the pottery found east of the Sigūr Road. There the figures on the loosely fitting lids of the urns are fairly well made, of a bright red pottery. Much larger pieces of bone are found in the urns than farther west, suggesting that the cremation process was less complete. "Many of the cairns are large, regularly built, and often faced with large slabs on the inside." In the most easterly area the urns were very finely made, with a mica glaze (Breeks 1873: 95).

These variations could be dismissed as expectable in a widespread culture-area; but the Nilgiri plateau is quite small, and the variations happen to correlate with an important social division within the Toda community, and hence should command attention. It was Rivers who correctly noted that all the old hamlets of the Teivaliol (Tōwfiḷ moiety) lie in the tract that is immediately west of the Sigūr Road. He therefore proposed this thesis:

The idea that the two divisions of the Toda community reached the hills at different times is perhaps supported by their distribution on the Nilgiri plateau. . . . In Fig. 74 I give a second plan, showing the positions of all the villages which I know to be ancient, either because they possess sacred dairies or because they are mentioned in legend.

It will be seen that the greater part of the hills is occupied by the Tartharol [moiety], while the Teivali villages lie chiefly in the north-west part of the hills. . . .

The plans certainly make it clear that there is a difference in the geographical distribution of the two divisions, and the nature of this distribution is consistent with the advent of the two divisions at different times. . . .

It is known that when two tribes coalesce to form a community, the inferior people may act as the sorcerers and wizards of the community. At the present time the majority of the *teuol*, or diviners, belong to the Teivaliol. . . . It is far from conclusive, but I incline to the view that the present organisation of the Todas is due to the coalescence of two tribes or castes which came to the hills at different times. It seems probable that the Tartharol arrived first and occupied the hills widely. When later the Teivaliol came, it seems possible that they were placed by the Tartharol in those priestly offices which, though honourable, involved many hardships and restrictions, and were assigned dwelling-places and pastures in a comparatively limited district of the hills. (Rivers 1906: 688-691)

Our Paikara site lies in the middle of this western tract, a mere 20 yards from a draw-well cairn. Within a mile of the Paikara site are several hamlets of the Tōwfiḷ moiety too. If we recall now Congreve's being told by a Toda that his ancestors had built the cairns, and the seemingly conflicting legend of a Kurumba god living in one cairn, the close parallel between the pottery vessels in the Paikara site and two others in the reportedly Kurumba cinerary burial at Talya begins to take on a new significance.

Further, a definite historical connection between the Kurubas (to use the more correct spelling) of Mysore and those of the Nilgiris was pointed out by Stuart in the 1891 census report:

They are the modern representatives of the ancient Kurumbas or Pallavas. . . . In the seventh century the power of the Pallava kings seems to have been at its zenith; but shortly after this, the Kongu, Chóla and Chálúkya chiefs succeeded in several victories over them. The final overthrow of the Kurumba sovereignty was effected by the Chóla King Ádondai, about the seventh or eighth century A.D., and the Kurumbas were scattered far and wide. Many fled to the hills, and in the Nílگیرis and the Wynád, in Coorg and Mysore, representatives of this ancient race are now found as wild and uncivilized tribes. (Stuart 1893: 289)

There is an epigraph dating to A.D. 769–770 which actually refers to a defeat by the Pāṇḍyan ruler Jaṭila-Parāntaka of Kurumbas a few years before, in the district of Nāṭṭukurumbu, west of Erode (Sewell 1932: 30).

It would seem that we have in fact some support for the following hypothesis. The Tōwfiḷy section of the Todas were descended from Kurumbas living in the Mysore plains, who fled to the hills in the eighth century on the occasion of the Pāṇḍyan attack to which we have just referred. They settled in a fairly restricted area beside other Todas already there, who were the ancestors of the superior To:rṟaṣ moiety. Some evidence in support of this contention is offered by Rivers, who lists some words that are totally different for Tōwfiḷy and To:rṟaṣ speakers.

I was told by the Tartharol that formerly there were many more, and that they were diminishing in number because “the Teivaliol were now learning to speak properly” . . . there can be no doubt of the existence of dialectical differences between the two divisions of the Toda people. . . . There is some reason to believe that people sometimes preserve a relic of their migrations in the belief concerning the path taken by the dead in their journey to the next world . . . the special point of interest in the present connexion is that the dead Teivaliol are believed to travel by a path different from that traversed by the Tartharol. . . .

A third indication is one about which I am still more doubtful. . . . When on the hills I was struck at times by differences in the general appearance of the people of the two divisions. . . . The Teivaliol seemed to me to be, on the whole, darker, and to have a lower type of face [*sic*]. (Rivers 1906: 687–688)

If indeed the Tōwfiḷy moiety had originated from a refugee branch of the Kurumba population, they would retain some of the polygenetic traits of the darker skin color and Australoid features of Kurumbas for many generations, since the moiety is endogamous.

Let us return for a moment to the Vēlvikuḍi grant, cited above, which mentioned how the Pāṇḍyan king had defeated the Kurumbas (Sewell 1932: 30). This same inscription tells us he had defeated a whole confederacy of chieftains, as a result of which he was able to annex the Koṅgu country to the Pāṇḍyan Empire (Sewell 1932: 31–32; Nilakanta Sastri 1966: 156–157). One of these chieftains, the Pallava prince Nandivarman II, was defeated on the south bank of the Kaveri River, not far from the Nílگیرis, and later fled to a nearby hill-fort (Hayavadana Rao 1930: 564). This, we suggest, was the historical background to the advent of Kurumbas and the introduction of at least some of the megalithic burials on the Nílگیرis.

But there is another dimension to this movement. The ancient cult of southern Mysore was a buffalo cult (as the Toda cult has been for many centuries). In

pointing out that the city of Mysore, where the goddess Chāmundi is now worshiped, takes its name from a word for “buffalo,” Rice long ago made the suggestion that

It might even be supposed that the legend of the conquest of Mahishāsura by Chāmundi is based on an historical fact,—a victory gained over the minotaur ruler of the Mahisha māṇḍala, or buffalo kingdom, by adherents of one of the Saktis of Siva, in consequence of which the Tudas and other tribes were driven to take refuge in the mountains, but that its frequent occurrence as a subject of sculpture in other parts seems to indicate that the triumph was an event of wider and more national importance. (Rice 1897: 211)

We have already referred to this buffalo deity as wearing a dagger on a Mahābalipuram relief which is paralleled by daggers excavated from the Nilgiri sites (Zimmer 1955: pl. 280).

There is no historical record of Chāmundi’s sacred hill in Mysore before A.D. 950. However, there is a reference dated A.D. 1117 which shows the Todas were resident on the Nilgiri plateau by that time (Rice 1898: 16, 10, inscrip. 83; Derrett 1957: 47). When their present social organization dates from, we do not know. In recent centuries the Todas have been divided into two moieties, which are basically endogamous, and these into a number of patrilineal clans.

Further confirmation of our hypothesis that the Kurumbas from Mysore became proto-Todas before A.D. 1117 lies in the modern funerary practices of Todas. After complex cremation ceremonies, the ashes are disposed of in a stone circle called *o:so:rm* (Rivers’ *azaram*) (Rivers 1906: 337–404; Hockings and Walker, in press). Prehistoric examples identified by Brecks near Kotagiri contained bronze ornaments and iron tools and weapons; and, as Grigg observed, “They contain exactly what an acquaintance with Tōda customs of the present day would lead one to expect. The only difference being that it seems formerly to have been the custom to bury bracelets and other valuables with the ashes, instead of withdrawing them when the burning has taken place as is now done” (1880: 239). Thus “it would appear that there are intermediate gradations between the more elaborate cairns or barrows containing the pottery and metal work and the simple Toda *azaram*” (Rivers 1906: 712).

Finally, if, as Emeneau suggests (1966: 27, no. 6), the name of Tōwfiḷ moiety is derived from *tōw* + *piḷy*, we have an etymology that can link this moiety directly with the funerary cult that erected the stone circles, since these two morphemes can be translated *god* + *ring*. (Emeneau points out that there are other possible etymologies, but that none of them is convincing.) “To[da] *tōw* ‘god’ is clearly related to and probably borrowed from Ka[nnada] *devva* ‘demon, evil spirit’ . . .” (Emeneau 1957: 56, n. 1).

It is thus apparent that there is a certain amount of evidence, some archaeological, some linguistic, and some historical, for supposing that people who around the eighth century A.D. built circles like the Paikara circle were refugee Kurumbas from Mysore, and that they became the founders of the Toda moiety known as Tōwfiḷ. (For a more detailed bibliography on Nilgiri prehistory than that which follows, the reader may consult my volume, *A Bibliography for the Nilgiri Hills of Southern India* [New Haven: HRAFlex Books, 1972].)

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